

Over the past year, the infestation of the light brown apple moth has filled the pages of our newspapers and has caused great concern up and down the coast. But it looks like the corner has been turned now that aerial application of pheromone over urban areas has been taken off the table by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

I began questioning officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture earlier this year, and in May began convening meetings with CDFA and the USDA to discuss all the tools available to combat this moth. Despite much of the rhetoric employed to combat the aerial application of the pheromone, this moth is an invasive species and needs to be eradicated. It not only has the potential to cause millions of dollars in damage to our crops, it also has the potential to devastate our native trees, bushes and shrubs. The effect this would have on other industries including tourism is enormous.

During meetings with CDFA and USDA officials, I expressed my concern that aerial application was becoming a lightning rod for protest and was putting the entire eradication effort in jeopardy. That could not be allowed to happen. During these meetings, CDFA admitted that the aerial application of pheromone was creating too many obstacles and agreed to cease using this tool over inhabited areas.

The bottom line for eradicating this pest has always been public safety. The public was never convinced that spraying was safe or the only option, and the result has been protests, anger and a series of lawsuits. It's vital that we don't delay in our efforts to control this pest using the many alternative tools that are even now becoming available.

The sterile moth program that will begin in 2009 will be another safe, effective tool. CDFA was correct to recognize that aerial application was becoming a distraction. A shift in strategy to focus on tools like the sterile moth was the right move.

I look forward to continuing to work with CDFA and USDA to make sure the public knows what tools are being used to combat this pest, and to make absolutely certain that we're employing only safe, effective tools.

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